Council Highlights: February, 1999

Number of secondary school applicants increases by 5.7%

In the first of its reports for the 1999 admissions cycle, the Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC) reported a 5.7 per cent increase over the same period last year in secondary school applicants. Greg Marcotte, Executive Director of OUAC, commented: "We are beginning to see the effects of the increase in the 18-to-24-year-old age group." He attributes approximately half of the overall increase to this demographic factor. The overall percentage increase represents the largest annual increase over a 10-year period and, according to Greg, "it is clear evidence that having a university education is key to career advancement in the new millennium."

Graduate placement survey update

The Ontario Universities' Application Centre mailed 52,175 surveys to 1996 graduates between December 29, 1998 and January 12, 1999. As of February 2, 1999, 9,634 responses were received by mail and 1,264 received by e-mail. Graduates who have not responded to date will be mailed another copy of the survey during the week of February 8-15, 1999. The COU-MET Steering Committee will review the survey results in the upcoming months, considering issues such as response rates, publication of data and protocol for the release of information.

COU and MET begin work on data-sharing protocol

The Ministry of Education and Training (MET) and COU have agreed to a set of broad principles related to data-sharing among COU, MET and Ontario universities. The ensuing agreement arose from the shared desire to extend the availability of data related to postsecondary education to help support individual mandates and responsibilities in a timely, cost-effective fashion. A working group composed of Sharon Berman, Ross Hamilton and Christopher Michael from MET and COU representatives Arlene Levine, Larry Payton and Murray Stinson (who will serve as chair in the first year) has been struck to implement the agreement. In its first meeting, the working group identified its major priorities for 1999: the implementation of data-sharing for financial and enrolment data, and the collection of faculty data. The working group will work closely with the Council on University Planning and Analysis (CUPA) to ensure that the information needs of universities are addressed.

Paper on degree-granting submitted to the Minister

In November 1998, COU formed the Task Force on Degree-Granting to examine the issue of degree-granting authority in Ontario and to develop a current COU position in response to a request from the Minister of Education and Training. The Task Force, chaired by Dr. Paul Davenport, submitted the paper, entitled *Access to Degrees for Ontario's College Students*, to the Minister on January 20, 1999. The paper was approved by Council at its December meeting.

University and college leaders to review proposed agreement on degree completion

University and college leaders will meet later in early March under the stewardship of the College-University Consortium Council (CUCC) to review the rationale, terms of reference and template for an agreement on degree completion for college graduates that was established at

the recent CUCC retreat, held on January 28-29, 1999.

Referred to as the "Port Hope accord," this timely and historic collaborative initiative respects institutional autonomy, safeguards the high academic standards of Ontario university degree programs, optimizes the recognition of learning achieved by college graduates, and provides the innovative, forward-looking pathways to degree completion for which colleges have been advocating at various levels. Once completed, the agreement will be a clear demonstration of the responsiveness of universities and colleges to the new economy and the related demand for a highly educated, globally competitive workforce.

The proposed degree completion agreement has been released to the COU and the Association of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology of Ontario (ACAATO) along with a discussion paper by Prof. Michael Skolnik of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto that framed discussion at the retreat, which was attended by university, college and Ministry representatives including Ian Clark, President of COU, and Joan Homer, Executive Director of ACAATO.

Validation of secondary school courses underway

The review of the proposed new secondary school courses by COU's member institutions (described in November's Council Highlights) is well underway. Co-ordinators have been appointed by all universities, and a group meeting has been held with central co-ordinator, Dr. Laura Selleck, and with Ministry of Education and Training (MET) officials. Plans are complete for Ministry representative Sylvia Solomon, Manager of the Curriculum Project, to visit each university to meet with the co-ordinators and other parties interested in the curriculum. The latest development is a request from MET's French Language Curriculum Policy Unit that COU establish a parallel process for the review of French-language curriculum documents.

A number of nominations have been submitted for membership to the subject-area committees, slated to be struck in early February. These committees will consider the views expressed by the separate institutional review bodies and make final recommendations about the new courses to COU and its member institutions. The process in place will allow Ontario universities to participate in the resolution of the many issues related to the new secondary school program of studies that remain unresolved.

Bell recognizes Ontario universities as a key partner for the future

John Sheridan, President of Bell Ontario, was the keynote speaker at the third Visionary Seminar, presented by the Office for Partnerships for Advanced Skills (OPAS) on February 3, 1999. In his remarks, Mr. Sheridan mapped out his vision of the future of the telecommunications industry while emphasizing the significant role of Ontario universities in this evolution. He said, "Bell Canada is keenly aware of the importance of Ontario universities as a place for research, as we've seen, but also as a seed-bed for tomorrow's brightest talents and most innovative ideas."

Mr. Sheridan presented his remarks to a live audience at Wilfrid Laurier University and via video broadcast to university faculty, students and industry representatives at universities throughout Ontario. In all, 12 universities and almost 1,000 people participated, not counting those who caught the seminar "live" via webcast. The event also attracted new partners from OPAS's developing National Network: Royal Roads University in Victoria, The University of Calgary and University College Cape Breton. For an information package on the seminar, contact OPAS at (416) 979-2165 ext. 259.

Biotechnology Symposium fosters university-industry dialogue

In response to a recommendation from the COU Task Force on Labour Market Issues, the Office for Partnerships for Advanced Skills (OPAS) and the Biotechnology Human Resource Council (BHRC) co-hosted a Biotechnology Symposium on research funding, university curricula and continued learning for the biotechnology workforce. The symposium, which was held on January 21, 1999, was co-chaired by Dr. Bill Leggett, Principal, Queen's University, and Graham Strachan, CEO, Allelix Biopharmaceuticals.
It featured major presentations from both university and industry representatives, who shared information and discussed issues facing both sectors. Representatives from 12 universities and from several industries across Ontario participated. The conclusions and recommendations from the symposium will be presented in a report, which will be available from OPAS and BHRC later this year. The symposium is part of a continuing dialogue between universities and key industry sectors.

New working group to review STEP (STudent Equivalency Program)

A new working group, chaired by Dr. David Marshall, President, Nipissing University, has been created to review the STEP (STudent Equivalency Program). The group held its first meeting on February 5, 1999 and, in the next few months, will meet to review and assess opportunities for further development.

COU director of health sciences leaves post in March

Brad Sinclair, Director of the Office of Health Sciences and Secretary to Council, will be leaving COU on March 26, 1999, after almost seven years of service. His professionalism, commitment to postsecondary education in Ontario and hand-crafted ties will be missed. Brad has accepted a position with the Ontario Hospital Association (OHA) as the new Director of Academic Health Sciences.

Organizational adjustments in the COU Secretariat

A number of organizational adjustments took effect at the COU Secretariat on February 1, 1999. The most visible change will be the result of the attempt to better integrate the secretariat support for two classes of activity: 1) Council and its standing committees and 2) task forces, working groups and affiliates.

Ken Snowdon (Vice-President, Policy and Analysis) will have responsibility for the COU-provided secretariat services for all vice-presidential bodies and for affiliates other than Ontario Council on Graduate Studies (provided by OCGS) and public affairs (provided by Public Affairs). It is hoped that this commonality in secretariat support will provide each of these bodies with a better ability to share relevant information and to generate mutually supporting research and analysis.

Sue West (Acting Secretary to Council) will have responsibility for providing secretariat services for all the standing committees of Council as well as the meetings of Council, Executive Heads Roundtable and Colleagues Caucus. Other staff members will continue to be intimately involved with particular files coming to these groups, but the responsibility for the smooth secretariat support lies with the Secretariat and Health Sciences Division.

Nicole Bégin-Heick will continue to provide lead support to the Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents (OCAV) and to the Ontario Council of University Researchers (OCUR) until the completion of her term at COU on June 30, 1999. The Executive Director for OCGS will maintain responsibility for the undergraduate programs review of audit process and be COU's senior advisor on matters relative to research and development. It is expected that Nicole's successor

will be closely involved with OCAV and OCUR.

Latest issue of *For the Record*

COU recently published its third issue of *For the Record* (Vol. 2. No.1). The COU newsletter provides updates on issues and events that affect Ontario universities and postsecondary education in the province. In this issue, there is a timely section, entitled "Preparing for Tomorrow Through Higher Education," which includes an article on the double cohort issue that was authored by Susan Bloch-Nevitte, Director of Public Affairs, University of Toronto. The newsletter also reviews the Premier's Conferences on Jobs and Prosperity and introduces members of Council for 1998-99. If you would like to receive a copy, please call (416) 979-2165 ext. 236.

Proposals to fund the transformation of university research libraries under review

The COU Task Force on Innovation and Collaboration, chaired by Dr. Mordechai Rozanski, President, University of Guelph, initiated a project to seek funding to extend the digital information management capabilities of university research libraries. A working group was struck to oversee the Ontario Universities Digital Library Transformation Project, which was established to address the widening gap between the growth of research data and publications and the need for management and preservation of that data.
The working group, chaired by Paul Wiens, Chief Librarian, Queen's University, provided updates on the group's progress at the latest Council meeting on February 12, 199. Infrastructure funding proposals of about $90 million over five years have been made to the Ontario government and the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) to provide more affordable access to global electronic journals, indexes, abstracts and geospatial data resources; affordable access to global and Canadian databases; rapid, efficient access to complex scientific databases; and sustainable, cost-effective search and delivery services.

The proposal to CFI has been advanced, together with other regional proposals, to phase two, which requires that a single, combined proposal for a pilot national site licensing project that will serve all Canadian universities be submitted by April 15, 1999.